

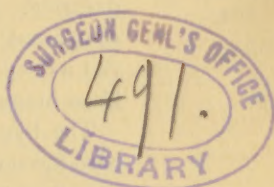
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THE MEANING AND THE METHOD OF LIFE.

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REPORT ON THE RECENT LITERATURE OF ETHICS AND RELATED TOPICS IN AMERICA.

1. THE MEANING AND THE METHOD OF LIFE. A SEARCH FOR RELIGION IN BIOLOGY. By George M. Gould, A.M., M.D. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893. Pp. 297.
2. A REVIEW OF THE SYSTEMS OF ETHICS FOUNDED ON THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION. By C. M. Williams. New York: Macmillan & Co., 1893. Pp. xv., 581.
3. FIRST STEPS IN PHILOSOPHY (PHYSICAL AND ETHICAL). By William Mackintire Salter. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1892. Pp. 156.

1. Amongst the books named in our list the first in order is also first in the warmth, the passionate directness, of the author's appeal to experience. The present reviewer has often confessed a partiality for the philosophical essayist, be he technical student of philosophy or not, who has really visited in person those regions, in the realms of the Spirit, which he tries to describe. And it is often surprising and saddening to observe how certain men can somehow write whole books about the absolute without showing that they have ever really tried to make the latter's acquaintance "in his native wilds," or that they know of such Absolute otherwise than by more or less technical hearsay, gathered from lectures and compends. Now, Dr. Gould is a man who has personally seen the face, not to be sure of the Absolute (for thereto he makes no pre-

tence), but of his own chosen problems as to the "meaning and method of life." It is this directness of experience, this presence of a truly passionate interest in the subject, which makes our author's work fascinating, and which ought to make it valuable for many who will not accept Dr. Gould's conclusions in his own form. These conclusions, as here stated, are embodied, indeed, rather in an excellent cosmical romance than in a reasoned philosophical doctrine. But cosmical romances are works of art that few can write, and the good cosmical romance is a fiction that is sure to veil a deeper truth than perhaps its own author imagines, especially if he himself takes his legend to be literally accurate.

The hypothesis of a finite creative being, toiling in a world of hard foreign facts,—a being conscious, active, benevolent, aiming at the highest, but partly baffled, thus far, in his ideal plans for the vitalizing and ennobling of a dead physical world, by the poverty and the stubbornness of material laws,—is an old idea. But it is an hypothesis that has never quite come to its historical rights. The motives that have led men to Theism have usually involved the idea of God's absoluteness. Dualism, in religion, has reconciled itself with such absoluteness through the hypotheses of a finite Free Will and of the fall of created spirits from their original innocence. This form of secondary dualism, as one may name it, has also absorbed, by known devices, the older and primary dualism which conceived the world as one of a contest between the good and the evil powers. An hypothesis, however, that shall regard God as finite, but as opposed, not to the Devil, or to any created rebels, but to the uncreated and blind forces of nature, these latter being not intentionally either good or evil, but being such as to be moulded only with difficulty,—an hypothesis which regards the creative work as now in progress, and as essentially incomplete, and its pangs and shortcomings as the incidents of the struggle between a well-wishing God and the world of blind fate,—well, such a doctrine has often been suggested, but not often well worked out. For Dr. Gould it is the one intelligible scheme of things. It is more. It is the one source of ethical inspiration. For our author preaches, not a mere theory, but a practical creed. The service of God gets, in his eyes, as he writes, what he takes to be its only vital meaning. God himself gets a new name. He is "Biologos." He wants life, and the best possible life. He struggles to create it. To serve him is to share his plan, to help him against the mighty, to take part in the world-fight, to help get the

better of the forces of nature, to extend organization, to live, as Biologos does, in the love of all living things; in a word, to be like God and to struggle shoulder to shoulder, as it were, with this architect of living cells and of thinking brains. He is not infinite; but he is at once leader and comrade in the ethical warfare.

Here is surely a scheme of things well worth the trouble of thinking out to its consequences. In setting himself this task our author appears as one well equipped with empirical illustrations derived from the biological sciences. His acquaintance with a considerable mass of them is as close and fresh as his own inner experience of life. It need not be said, however, that this empirical material is here used, not technically, nor in the service of science for its own sake, but rather by way of illustrating the general cosmical hypothesis. The latter, meanwhile, is itself presented with all the naïve and charming immediacy of a divine intuition. One does not prove this intuition; one simply sees its truth. The author's experience as to this matter is presented with all the usual characteristics that mark, in literature, the confessions of such intuitive experiences. "For twenty or more years I have despairingly ransacked the wisdom of ethnic religions, systems of philosophy, and of natural theology, and, lo! under the microscope I found God at work, and in biology revealing Himself so fast and so far as fate and his myriad difficulties allowed, self His incarnation and deputy, Duty and Intellect His pleading with the deputy to become co-partner and helper in the Divinization of the World. . . . Science and religion equally and alike await the vision and knowledge of the ever-present living and struggling God" (p. 9). This dissatisfaction with technical philosophy, this appeal to immediate insight, determine the whole of the following discussion of those fundamental problems which interest our author. Such a doctrine needs, of course, as its background, a realistic metaphysic. This our author finds ready to hand, and accepts it without a shadow of reflective concern. "Berkeley, Hegel, Spinoza, and others" have "spun imaginative phantasmagoria" in "dreamland and wordland;" but what they said does not concern us, and is in fact apparently dangerous, if not wicked (p. 30). An extract from Mr. Salter's exposition of the idealistic analysis of reality, quoted on pp. 140, 141, seems to Dr. Gould to embody only "jugglings with words after such words have been disconnected from a vital significance and relationship with facts." "To see no difference between the objective, self-existent causes of sensation and the

ultimate products of sensation is simply philosophic barbarism or monomania. It is not healthy thought. To deny objectivity and self-existence because the forces and impingements of matter must be translated into sensation before being presented to mind, is to flatter one's self that dreams and imaginations are facts; it is a lazy sort of dogmatism that contents itself with the whirr of subjective machinery."

An idealist would naturally answer this vehemence by saying that of course the only penalty for one who will not philosophize with critical considerateness concerning the nature of his knowledge of truth, and who will still love the world and write about it,—that, I say, the only penalty for such a thinker lies in the fact that he is then confined to his cosmical romances. But the present romance, as has already been said, has its charm in something else than its philosophically critical character, and one is little disposed to interrupt this man of unique experiences either here, or when, elsewhere, he summarily indicts, or with equally summary immediacy propounds, other speculative views. All proofs of God's existence are vain (p. 51). "If instinctively one have the belief in his heart, he would better never read the 'proofs.'" "Facts need no proving." And the plain facts are that the phenomena of life, from the lowest to the highest, are utter exceptions in the world of physical processes. "The simplest bit of alga, diatom, or of self-mobile protoplasm proves God's existence" (p. 54). For everything that lives embodies a purpose. And no mechanism can embody a purpose. "If you don't see and perceive God, no reasoning and proof will enable you to do so."

The "Design-argument," regarded from a critical point of view, is never more admirable than when it is short. And our author's form is as short as any upon record. He joins it (p. 55) with an equally immediate interpretation, in his own sense, of the contrast between consciousness in any sentient being, and the physical realities about this being. "The hyperphysical, therefore, is a fact, and this hyperphysical is mental, volitional, purposive" (p. 56). As this hyperphysical element is identical in respect of its ultimate nature, in all living beings that are conscious, the unity of the living things points to some one hyperphysical source of them all.

"Of course," continues our author, "no Infinite or Omnipotent is gained by this road, but none such is desirable. We reach, however, a working and actual God, of very satisfying proportions and powers." Meanwhile, our author regards the doctrine of the

infinity and omnipotence of God as not only an unproved, but an impious doctrine, since it would put "the reason and ground" of "evil and imperfection in the very being of God, instead of in a condition outside of Himself," "which He is successfully and progressively overcoming. Waste worlds, incomprehensible mechanicalism, glaring evil, deadness, uselessness, are everywhere the distinguishing characteristics of the mechanical universe. If God did all this, He is an incomprehensible God, and covers in Himself such hideous contradictions that I prefer blank atheism as being far more truthful and comforting both to the intellect and to the heart" (p. 31). "Monism" (p. 28) "is muddleism. It is the sole system of religion or philosophy without any truth whatever as a basis."

Enough, perhaps, of these intuitive proclamations. Their only significance lies in the fact that our author is above all ethical in his concern, and feels precisely that opposition between the ethical and the all-powerful characteristics, in the God of tradition, which has so divided in twain the religious consciousness of the ages. The worth of the present intuition lies then in the fruits that spring from it. And there is something delightful, as one reads Dr. Gould's glowing pages, in watching this fervent student of current medical and of general biological lore, who, inspired by a moral devotion, "sees," "under the microscope," the workings of a God whom he now has to conceive with attributes quite pathetically, yes, tragically, human. This, for him, is a God who struggles with death (*i.e.*, with "the problem of nutrition") and who hates death as we do, but who, owing to the unsolved "problem of nutrition," cannot yet make cells or bodies that will be able to escape it. The problem of evil is not our problem alone, but "Biologos" is toiling at it. We may yet help him on the road towards the solution. One's relation to Biologos is once more very similar to Abraham's relation to his God. One takes counsel with him, as it were, concerning Sodom and Gomorrah. Meanwhile, such thoughts make very concrete to our author the notion that the business of man's life is to "imitate God, to do what God is doing, and to be what he is" (p. 243). Since God is the essentially biological being, the study of biology becomes, for our author, as for Spencer, but with much more warmth of meaning, a part of ethics. The respect for all living things thus gets a very definite formulation. Buddhistic ethics ought even to be extended. The vegetable world ought to be included within the range of the objects of our duty. There

should be "a society for the prevention of cruelty to trees" (p. 243). The highest and the lowest virtues are alike to get formulated in biological terms. The fault of the former doctrines that have made natural laws the basis of ethics, has been that such doctrines have not known what part of nature to select as the model for virtue. The heavens do not of themselves declare the glory of God. In the author, of old, before he found his insight, these "useless worlds" used to arouse only "cosmic horror" (p. 7). Not the telescope but the microscope is the religious instrument. It is the study of the processes of life that alone shows us in nature the models for our conduct. The author is sure that these models can be made very definite. The "Kingdom of God" must include "the subhuman part of the incarnation process" (p. 246), for in all living things the purpose of *Biologos* is incarnate, and is to be observed. "The extension and perfection of healthy life over the globe is undoubtedly the plainest aim and the most primary work of *Biologos*. Whatever aids in that is right and whatever opposes it is wrong" (p. 248). To the working out and application of this practical doctrine, whose simplicity, directness, and purity of motive our author constantly insists upon, much of his space is devoted, in chapters which are full of the very manly and vital experience of the concrete issues of life upon which stress has been laid in the foregoing. Here it is that what we have called our author's cosmical romance gets its moral expressed, and, in its own way, will make its influence felt.

The air of what we have called "unique experience" in this volume can be but faintly suggested by such a review. These propounders of intuitions will always be welcome guests in philosophy. For the rest, our author's "twenty years" of search among the religions and philosophies have indeed left him singularly unaware that his romance of the "struggling God," "incarnate" in a time world, and unable there to do his perfect work until the fulfilment of times, is not only a familiar idea of traditional theology (as our author does indeed fully recognize), but is also the symbol of a very deep metaphysical truth, which the so much abhorred "Monism" of philosophy has not only recognized, but has expressed to the full, and without any loss of its Monism, either. That the Eternal, without hurt to his Eternity, appears and must appear in time as the struggling and incomplete One, beladen with dualism, with evil, with unattained ideals, surrounded with a world of uncomprehended fragments,—well, this for "mon-

istic" philosophy, of the sort now referred to, is most decidedly an old story. To be sure, it takes more than the intuitive glance of one who believes only in the immediate "facts," to conceive how these things may be. And herewith enough, in this place, of our author's most admirable personal confession. We commend this book to all lovers, not only of Biologos, but of vigorous temperament.

